SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION:
DESCRIPTION, RESEARCH AND THEORY

CRN: 22982 - SPRING 2014

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Rationale:

Second language acquisition (SLA) is a field of **RESEARCH** that seeks to understand the **PROCESSES** that bring about the **DEVELOPMENT** of languages other than the native language (L2). The two major objectives of SLA are to: (I) provide a **DESCRIPTION** of the acquisition and development of the L2, and (II) develop an **EXPLANATORY ACCOUNT** of the **INTERNAL COGNITIVE-LINGUISTIC** factors that constrain L2 acquisition as well as the **EXTERNAL SOCIOCULTURAL** factors that guide this process.

Objectives:

1. To become familiar with some of the most recent second language acquisition approaches.
2. To develop a general understanding of some of the most recent second language acquisition theories and hypotheses.
3. To investigate in depth one or more specific aspects of the field of second language acquisition.
4. To acquire a critical, reflective attitude with respect to second language research.

Focus:

Major topics to be described and analyzed in detail in this course are:

1. Linguistic processes (e.g., L1 influence, universal factors, developmental stages)
2. Cognitive processes (e.g., attention to form, skill-based learning, controlled versus automatic processing, task-based learning, aptitude)
3. Sociocultural processes (e.g., communicative pressure, interaction, motivation)
4. Research hypotheses of SLA in the context of classroom L2 learning,
5. Research methodologies (e.g., case studies, experimental studies, action research, laboratory studies),
6. Interpretation of findings from SLA research (e.g., data collection procedures, research methodology, data analysis),

[Other issues of interest to participants in the course will also be considered.]

Required Bibliography:

(1) Mitchell, Rosamond, Florence Miles & Emma Marsden. (2013). Second Language Learning Theories. Third Edition. New York: Arnold Publishers.

- This is a very readable book that provides a comprehensive overview of the field of second language acquisition. I chose this book because it represents the collaboration of

three researchers with distinct areas of focus/expertise in second language acquisition: a theoretical linguist, a cognitive specialist and an educational researcher.

- A second reason for choosing this volume as the main reader for this course is that it is recent and up to date.
- Finally, keep in mind that the arguments proposed by the authors for each specific topic may not necessarily be my own. In other words, feel free to criticize their position.

(2) A series of notes (in text format and slide format) with a summary and expansion of the topics covered in the main textbook. I will distribute these notes as the course progresses.

(3) A series of articles to be distributed after we finish the discussion of the main textbook. These readings will be selected to guide the selection of topics for the final project. The selection will take into account—as much as possible—interests of the students registered in the course.

Recommended Bibliography:

Ellis, Rod (1997). Second Language Acquisition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
This is a very short book that covers most of the same topics covered by the required book but in a somewhat different style of presentation. I will be using some examples from this book for class discussions.

Grading components:

10%: Participation in class discussions of assigned readings and other class activities.
30%: Three exams on chapter content (**Jan. 30, Feb. 20** & **March 20**).
10%: One final project proposal (2 pages): **due on April 1.**
10%: One review of another student's proposal (2 pages): **due on April 8**.
10%: One formal oral presentation of your final project.
30%: One final research project: **due on May 8** (10-15 pages double-space).

Grade scale: I will assign grades on a numerical 100 point-scale (percentages). The distribution of the percentages according to letter grades is as follows:

98-100 = A+	87-89.9 = B+	78-79.9 = C+	68-69.9 = D+
93-97.9 = A	83-87.9 = B	73-77.9 = C	63-67.9 = D
90-92.9 = A-	80-82.9 = B-	70-72.9 = C-	60-62.9 = D-

Grading criteria: Please see attached handout with criteria for evaluation of research papers assigned for this course.

CALENDAR WITH ASSIGNED READINGS:

JANUARY MEETINGS:

Jan. 14:	Introduction to the course. Basic concepts: Second Language Acquisition.
Jan. 16:	Ch. 1: Key concepts and issues: Linguistics and research methodologies.
Jan. 21:	Ch. 2: The recent history of L2 learning research.
Jan. 23:	Ch. 3: Linguistics and language learning: The UG approach.
Jan. 28:	Ch. 3: Linguistics and language learning: The UG approach.
Jan. 30:	Ch. 4: Cognitive approaches to L2 learning: general, implicit.
	Exam 1 (content of chapters 1-3 + content of class discussions)

FEBRUARY MEETINGS:

Feb. 4:	Ch. 4: Cognitive approaches to L2 learning: general, implicit.
Feb. 6:	Ch. 5: Cognitive approaches to L2 learning: memory/conscious learning.
Feb. 11:	Ch. 5: Cognitive approaches to L2 learning: memory/conscious learning.
Feb. 13:	Ch. 6: Interaction in L2 learning.
Feb. 18:	Ch. 6: Interaction in L2 learning.
Feb. 20:	Ch. 7: Functionalist/pragmatic perspectives on L2 learning.
	Exam 2 (content of chapters 4-6 + content of class discussions)
Feb. 25:	Ch. 7: Functionalist/pragmatic perspectives on L2 learning.
Feb. 27:	Ch. 8: Sociocultural perspectives on L2 learning.

SPRING BREAK

MARCH MEETINGS:

Mar. 11:	Ch. 8: Sociocultural perspectives on L2 learning.
Mar. 13:	Ch. 9: Sociolinguistic perspectives.
Mar. 18:	Ch. 9: Sociolinguistic perspectives.
Mar. 20:	Ch. 10: Conclusion.
	Exam 3 (content of chapters 7-9 + content of class discussions)
Mar. 25:	Ch. 10: Conclusion.
Mar. 27:	Review and catch-up time with guided readings.

APRIL MEETINGS:

Apr. 1:	Discussion of students' proposals for final project.
Apr. 3:	*Spring recess-University holiday*
Apr. 8:	Analysis of students' data for final project.
Apr. 10:	Analysis of students' data for final project.
Apr. 15:	Analysis of students' data for final project.
Apr. 17:	Oral presentations of final projects.
Apr. 22:	Oral presentations of final projects.
Apr. 24:	Review and conclusion. **Course evaluation.**

COURSE REGULATIONS:

About this document: I hope this course will provide you with a positive learning experience; to that end, I would like to be as clear as possible about my expectations. If you have any questions about the information in this document please see me; I'll be happy to discuss it in more detail.

Calendar: Actual learning is not easily determined by schedule. Thus, the previous proposed calendar is subject to modifications according to students' progress.

Course Workload: According to the academic calendar there will be 27 meetings of 1.5 academic hours each for a total of 40.5 hours of class time. The required readings and assignments for the course will require a minimum investment of approximately 5 hours per week (outside of class) for students with the required background in the subject matter.

Attendance: Learning is an active and collaborative process. I expect you to attend class unless serious circumstances prevent that, in which case, I would appreciate your contacting me about your absence before class if at all possible.

Absences: Legitimate excuses to be absent from class include (but are not limited to) verified illnesses, family emergencies, and religious holidays. All *unexcused* absences will negatively affect the final course grade. *If you have accumulated more than 3 absences (whether excused or unexcused) you should contact me immediately to determine if you can continue with the course.*

Tardiness: We have a very short time assigned to work together so make every effort to be on time. Not only is arriving late rude; it also disrupts the learning process for the entire class. However, keep in mind that I'd rather you come to class late rather than skip class altogether.

Communication: Please note that any important communication regarding absences, extended deadlines, grade appeals, etc. must be in writing, ideally through email. It is the students' responsibility to comply with the assignments of the course and to keep track of his/her progress.

Readings: Be sure to complete the *assigned readings before each class*; otherwise you will be unable to take effective notes and to profit from the discussions in class. Lectures, before-class readings and in-class discussions among peers are meant to complement each other rather than repeat each other; thus, reading the material before class is critical to succeed.

Teaching method: The course will be a lively mixture of lectures, discussions and students' presentations. During the course of our conversations I will be asking questions for which I have already discussed possible answers several times in the past and for which, in many cases, I already have a formed opinion and an answer. I want you to have the opportunity to think about potential answers before I propose other alternatives. In no way should this technique be regarded as disrespectful of your opinions.

Study techniques: Given that second language acquisition is the science of the development of language, essay questions and problems will ask you to think scientifically. Therefore, statements of opinion are of limited value—whether or not they agree with the instructor's point of view—unless they are supported by valid logical argumentation, and whenever possible based on rigorous empirical evidence. As you study keep in mind essential guiding questions such as:

- How does the author know this is true?, On the basis of what evidence is this statement valid?
- Could we gather a different conclusion should some research conditions be different?, Are there alternative ideas worth exploring? and so on.

In essence, be critical and be willing to challenge assertions without supporting evidence—especially so the ones you'll find in your readings.

Standards of Quality: I expect you to take yourself and the course seriously, refusing to stop at the absolute minimum requirements, insisting on having what you say orally and on paper be as clear and effective as possible.

Class participation: Class participation not only provides necessary information and review of the material covered in the course, it is also a forum for critical dialogue, sharing ideas with peers and speculating of hypotheses and ideas from others.

Class atmosphere: Keep in mind that any true discussion involves personal exposure and thus the taking of risks. Your ideas may not coincide with the ones from your neighbor or instructor. Yet, as long as your points are honest and substantiated to the best of your knowledge, they will be respected by everyone else in the classroom; and especially by myself.

Written assignments: All written assignments are to be typed. No handwritten work will be accepted.

Honor Code (http://honor.rice.edu/): I abide by and assume that you too will abide by the honor code of Rice University. If you have any questions about the code or its interpretation in any given circumstance, please ask me. I'll be happy to share the responsibility of its interpretation.

1. All assignments submitted by undergraduates at the University are covered by the Honor System, …
2. … it is the student's responsibility to understand how the Honor System applies to each individual assignment and any questions should be raised with the instructor before submitting the assignment.
3. It is the obligation of every student and faculty member to not violate the system, to not aid in any violation, and to report any violation seen or suspected.
4. The following pledge shall be signed at the end of all assignments on which the pledge is required by the instructor: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unauthorized aid on this (examination, quiz or paper)."

Incomplete coursework: No incompletes will be given unless there is a prior written agreement between instructor and student.

Extra credit assignments: Completing all requirements assigned for this course will keep you occupied throughout the semester. For that reason I do not give extra-credit assignments.

Disabilities: If you have a documented disability that will impact your work in this class, please contact me to discuss your needs during the first two weeks of class. Additionally, you will need to register with the Disability Support Services Office in the Allen Center.

Emergency evacuation policy:

1. Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
2. Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class. In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors.
3. Anyone on campus requiring emergency police, fire or medical services may dial ext. 6000 from any Rice phone to reach the Rice University Police Department (713-348-6000 from a non-Rice phone).